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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7984th meeting

Tuesday, 27 June 2017, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Klein
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/282)

Thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2017/510)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/282)

Thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2017/510)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Liberia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I should like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2017/282, which contains the text of a letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, as well as to document S/2017/510, which contains the thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Zarif and by Ambassador Olof Skoog, Permanent Representative of Sweden, in his capacity as Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zarif.

Mr. Zarif: It is a pleasure to be here today to present the Secretary-General's latest report on Liberia, dated 16 June (S/2017/510).

As the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) enters the final phase of its mandate, Liberia has remained stable. No major threats are envisaged beyond possible isolated and sporadic incidents of a public-order nature in the context of the presidential and legislative elections in October, and the subsequent transition of Government in January. It will be crucial for Liberia's law-enforcement agencies to be adequately prepared to respond to potential low-level civil unrest and mob violence during this delicate period. Current limitations in manpower, equipment and mobility may restrict the ability of these agencies to respond to multiple simultaneous security incidents.

UNMIL is supporting the Liberia National Police in elaborating an integrated election-security plan to ensure the most effective utilization of available resources to protect civilians. The Liberia National Police has also conducted community-policing activities across the country aimed at building trust and communication with the population ahead of the elections. UNMIL, in collaboration with the Government and local actors, including Liberian traditional communicators, has undertaken public-awareness campaigns country-wide to mitigate the risk of mob justice and encourage adherence to the rule of law.

UNMIL stands ready to respond to any situation amounting to a risk of strategic reversal of peace and stability. Yet the extent of this response will be restricted by the reduced Mission capacity, the low number of uniformed personnel and the potentially competing mandated task of protecting United Nations personnel. At present, UNMIL has 260 personnel in its two formed police units and 230 personnel of the Nigerian infantry company.

We presently maintain only two field offices, in the north-east and the north-west. Formed police units and force personnel are deployed only in Monrovia, which significantly limits our capacity to intervene. This is a significant change from the last two presidential elections, when UNMIL had a country-wide presence. Other factors could also have an impact on our ability to perform our mandate. Any substantial reduction, therefore, in the modest and lean budget we submitted to the General Assembly would significantly affect the ability of UNMIL to deliver on the mandate given by the Council.

While UNMIL is preparing for the transition of residual mandated activities to the Government of Liberia, the United Nations country team and other partners, it remains fully engaged in all aspects of its mandate, with a particular emphasis on good offices and political facilitation. As the elections draw closer, the Mission has further intensified its engagement with

the National Elections Commission, political party leaders, presidential candidates, the Government and civil society to prevent and defuse tensions, help resolve disputes and advocate for inclusive, transparent, credible and peaceful elections. The country's future as a stable democracy will hinge on the successful conduct of the October elections and broad agreement that they were free and fair, followed by a smooth transfer of power from the current Government to a new Administration. There are many presidential candidates, including the incumbent Vice-President and several formidable opposition-party candidates, who will almost certainly have to form coalitions to enhance their chances in a possible run-off.

At the initiative of the Government, the Interreligious Council of Liberia organized, on 31 May and 1 June 2017, a national forum of all political party leaders, culminating in the parties' commitment to a violence-free electoral process and transfer of power. The commitment, referred to as the Farmington River Declaration, built on a combination of agreements previously reached among the parties. The Declaration also endorsed the establishment of a peace and mediation committee to help guide relations among and between the political parties and State institutions for a peaceful transition. The Declaration was formalized on 4 June 2017 during the summit conference of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Heads of State. UNMIL, the African Union and ECOWAS collectively engaged with the parties to ensure their support for this significant initiative.

The Government also submitted a draft bill on arrangements for the smooth transition of authority to a new Government. The Government has established a transition team that will attend to asset transfers, handover notes and other matters, so as to ensure that the incoming Government assumes its functions as seamlessly as possible.

On 8 June, the Senate proposed to amend part XII of the Code of Conduct law, with which the House of Representatives concurred on 13 June. The amendment, inter alia, seeks to provide a governing framework for the operations of the Office of the Ombudsman. The amendment also requires that electoral matters be adjudicated by the National Elections Commission in the first instance, with appeals to the Supreme Court, which has caused additional uncertainty about the eligibility of candidates for nomination, which process started on 19 June.

Meanwhile, the exhibition of the provisional registration roll, which took place from 12 to 17 June, encountered technical issues, including, reportedly, missing names and photographs of several individuals, although the Commission has claimed that all registered individuals will be allowed to vote in October. It will be important that the Commission address these challenges so as to prevent uncertainty in connection with the process and its results, which could lead to distrust and amplify existing problems.

Despite the important gains made over the years of post-conflict recovery, Liberia continues to face considerable challenges, which weigh heavily on efforts to sustain peace and advance national reconciliation. Critical legislative reforms, widely accepted as minimum requirements to address the underlying causes of conflict, most notably the land rights bill and the local governance bill, are yet to be enacted. The decisive steps needed to help bring more security to the lives of women have yet to be taken, including the passage of the domestic violence bill. I continue to engage vigorously with the Government, particularly the Legislature, to help advance these transformational reforms.

I am encouraged by the gradual strengthening of Liberia's human rights capacity, illustrated, for example, by the recent international accreditation of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights following several years of UNMIL's technical support in capacity-building. The Commission must intensify its efforts to address the serious human rights challenges, including sexual and gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices and challenges with respect to freedom of speech, which continue to plague Liberia. For instance, over the past two weeks, from late May to early June, UNMIL counted seven reported cases of rape, both by individuals and gang rape, of minors, including children of both sexes. The Government should implement as a matter of urgency the salient recommendations of the 2016 UNMIL-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights report on addressing impunity for rape in Liberia. In this regard, UNMIL has stepped up media activities and interactive programming on the themes of sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, national reconciliation and the promotion of human rights.

On 4 April, the Secretary-General transmitted to the Security Council the Liberia peacebuilding plan,

which was developed in consultation with national and international stakeholders by the United Nations system and the Government of Liberia. The plan identifies key actions set to take place before 30 March 2018, when UNMIL's substantive mandate ends, and outlines the level of necessary political engagement. The peacebuilding plan provides the basis for the United Nations system's integrated transition plan, which is currently being finalized in consultation with the Government and civil-society actors.

Sustaining peace in Liberia must look to horizons beyond the immediate needs of the transition process, requiring long-term investment in national institutions that are inclusive, accountable and responsive, providing opportunities and services to all Liberians. To that end, the Government has started developing specific actions for the implementation of each of its commitments under the plan, and the Mission is assisting with this process to, hopefully, ensure that it is done in a timely and successful manner. In that context, I would like to express my appreciation for the helpful assistance from the Peacebuilding Commission's configuration for Liberia, chaired by Ambassador Skoog, who has just completed a very useful visit to the country.

The United Nations country team recently completed a capacity mapping exercise to assess its readiness to provide strategic and programmatic support to Liberia after UNMIL's departure. The findings showed that it will need significant assistance to increase its capacity, resources and expertise. Efforts are currently under way to mobilize support so that the transition from UNMIL to the country team is conducted seamlessly and responsibly and can effectively support Liberia's efforts to achieve sustainable peace.

One programmatic aspect is the establishment of an independent presence for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is essential for monitoring and capacity-building. With regard to financing, a Liberia transition multipartner trust fund, aimed at making the country team's funding and operations more predictable, is being discussed. Given that most of the priorities outlined in the Liberia peacebuilding plan require the country team's medium-to-long-term engagement, it will be essential to ensure that Liberia has the international community's sustained political and financial support. In that regard, we are also discussing an international conference that will enable the new Liberian Government to share its national priorities. It could be organized for April 2018, when there will be a review of the statement of mutual commitments, which, together with the peacebuilding plan, could form the basis for a framework of mutual accountability between the new Government and the international community, as represented by the United Nations.

It is therefore a concern that the most recent draft of the national budget for 2017-2018 has little room for investment in social and economic intervention, which is essential if the key drivers of conflict are to be addressed. Currently, 94 per cent of the estimated $526.5 million budget is committed to recurring costs, including payrolls, leaving just $27.3 million — I repeat, just $27.3 million — for public-sector investment plans. At the same time, the budget is 12.3 per cent lower than the 2016-2017 budget of $600.2 million. The continuing shortfalls in national resources for supporting Liberia's transition and consolidating peace will be felt even more acutely as international donor assistance declines.

Liberia has made remarkable progress since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra in 2003. However, challenges that pose a risk of reversal still remain. The Government of Liberia, the United Nations system and the wider international community must continue to address them with all the energy and innovation available to them if we are to preserve and reinforce the gains made in the intervening years. I appeal to all concerned to increase and consolidate their investment in Liberia and support the country at this crucial time, through its transition to a new Government and beyond.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Zarif for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Skoog.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation to brief the Security Council in my capacity as Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. It gives me great pleasure to share with the Council some of the main takeaways from my recent trip to Liberia. The objective of my visit of 14 and 15 June was to follow up on progress made in the implementation of the peacebuilding plan; discuss preparations for the upcoming elections; consult with stakeholders on key reforms related to land rights and decentralization; and identify ways in which the Peacebuilding Commission can best offer support during the upcoming transitions.

I was fortunate enough to be able to meet with a wide range of stakeholders, including President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Deputy Ministers from the departments of internal affairs, foreign affairs and finance, as well as the Ministry of Justice. I also met with representatives of civil society, youth representatives, political parties, the National Elections Commission, the Chief Justice and Supreme Court justices, and representatives of the international community. At this point I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Liberia and his delegation for being consistently supportive of my visits, and to say that working with Liberia, as part of the Peacebuilding Commission, has been an exceptionally good experience. It is a pleasure to work with a country that is itself so committed to working with the Commission.

In my meetings, I welcomed the dedicated, inclusive and swift efforts of the Government and of the United Nations to develop a peacebuilding plan in response to the Council's resolution 2333 (2016). I also stressed the importance of undertaking key structural reforms, as set out in phase I of the peacebuilding plan, which will help to address some of the root causes of conflict in Liberia. That includes the enacting of important bills on issues such as land rights, local Government and domestic violence. I also urged all stakeholders to contribute to free and fair elections, prioritize women's strong participation in them and involve young people throughout the process. In addition to the rich briefing we have just heard by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, I would like to share the impressions with which I left Monrovia.

As we have noted in the past couple of months, Liberia is at a critical juncture. Several historic transitions are under way. The situation therefore requires, and deserves, the dedicated attention of international partners in the months ahead. While no one I met suggested to me that there is a clear or imminent risk of a relapse into conflict, there are real hurdles ahead as the peacekeeping Mission closes down and the new Government takes the reins. We know that the main root causes of conflict in Liberia must continue to be addressed. Reconciliation, land use, decentralization, access to justice, and violence against women are among the more critical issues that are still to be resolved and that will determine whether Liberia moves towards a true and lasting consolidation of peace. As we just heard, the limited fiscal capacity to take reforms forward under the current Administration may itself lead to increased grievances. Diversification and revitalization of the economy are desperately needed.

On the security side, the overall situation remains stable. While the Government successfully resumed responsibility for its security as of July 2016, there is still work to be done to further build the capacity of security actors, including the armed forces and the Liberia National Police. Efforts aimed at strengthening access to justice and the rule of law are equally important and remain vital to fostering a sense of inclusion and social cohesion and to building trust in national institutions.

In four months' time, Liberians will be heading to the polls, and the preparations for elections are well under way. They have been described as a defining moment for Liberia, one in which the country will see the first democratic transfer of power in its modern history. Successful elections and a peaceful transition will undoubtedly help to consolidate democracy and good governance. During our visit, the National Elections Commission was working on a voter registration exhibition designed to address irregularities in the registration process. As we just heard, in a welcome move earlier this month, political parties signed the Farmington River declaration on the margins of the Summit of the Economic Community of West African States in Monrovia, in which they committed to peaceful elections.

The other challenges outstanding pertain to a funding gap for the activities of the Elections Commission and to controversies related to the application of the code of conduct, and should be addressed and resolved as soon as possible. In addition, we should stress the continuing need for civic education, awareness-raising and outreach to a largely disenfranchised population ahead of the election, and for increased efforts to ensure strong participation by women. The fact that the election is taking place during the rainy season is a complicating factor.

As of now, 22 political parties are fielding candidates. Some stakeholders have expressed worries about the fact that candidates may be running on personalized platforms and may mobilize voters around identity politics instead of running policy-based campaigns. I encouraged representatives of political parties to focus their campaigning on the key issues confronting the country rather than mobilizing around tribal politics. I commend the active and important role played by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

generally, and the Office of the Special Representative in particular, in facilitating dialogue in the run-up to the election. In my discussions with both the National Elections Commission and the Chief Justice, I once again stressed the need for solid mechanisms for swift dispute resolution and for managing run-offs, which they confirmed are in place.

During my meetings with a range of stakeholders, I noted a broad sense of ownership of the Liberia peacebuilding plan. Its commitments set out a clear road map for addressing the country's remaining peacebuilding challenges. Financing for the implementation of the commitments made remains an outstanding issue.

In meetings with the United Nations system in Monrovia, I discussed the kind of support that the United Nations can provide in taking those commitments forward in the light of the UNMIL drawdown and the coming transition in the United Nations presence. In that regard, I commend the United Nations country team for having carried out robust mapping of its capacities. I believe that it may be the first of its kind.

This has clearly been a highly useful exercise. It has provided a clear point of departure and has enabled the whole United Nations system in Liberia to think strategically about the transition and about how to increase capacity in the country team as UNMIL leaves, so that it can take over support for residual tasks. However, it also means that we have a very clear picture of what will be needed in the future. It is worrying to note that, as UNMIL draws down, the United Nations will clearly face a cliff in terms of resources, capacities and expertise for the support of peacebuilding.

Given those capacity constraints and based on the Peacebuilding Commission's experience with the United Nations transition in Sierra Leone, several members of the Peacebuilding Commission have flagged concerns about UNMIL's transition to the country team. The Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission could help the United Nations system to identify how to responsibly manage the transition and how to ensure predictable financing for peacebuilding in Liberia during the critical transition phase.

We commend the efforts of UNMIL over the past 13 years. As the peacekeeping mission withdraws, it will serve as a test case for the United Nations system and Liberia in the fulfilment of peacebuilding and sustaining-peace goals and tasks. Liberia has come a long way since the conflict ended, and much progress has been achieved. However, the current situation means that the indicators of fragility continue to exist, in particular insufficient progress on reconciliation and on needed legislation for addressing the root causes of the conflict, the weak economy and the upcoming election, where the stakes are high. Liberia's international partners have a collective responsibility to make sure that the investments made over the past 13 years, through peacekeeping, are safeguarded, and to build on those investments in order to consolidate the peace in Liberia. That includes ensuring that the remaining United Nations presence is configured and provided with sufficient resources to respond to the ongoing needs of the Liberian people through peacebuilding support.

In his recent trip to New York, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General ElHillo stated that

> "Liberia represents a success story in peacekeeping. We now must ensure that it is also a success in peacebuilding."

That will require innovative thinking on how to secure reliable resources once UNMIL has departed, and the Security Council has a key role to play in the process. For our part, the Peacebuilding Commission stands ready to continue its political accompaniment, ensuring continued international attention after the peacekeepers have left and insisting on drawing attention to gaps. We will undertake continued advocacy on the importance of pursuing reforms that are central for sustaining peace in Liberia.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ambassador Skoog for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Farid Zarif, and the Permanent Representative of Sweden and Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Olof Skoog, for their comprehensive briefings.

Uruguay congratulates the Government and the people of Liberia for the progress achieved in bringing stability to the country. It is also important to recognize that the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has played a leading role in this process for more than

13 years. Liberia is currently going through a crucial moment on the eve of the presidential and legislative elections, and less than a year before the definitive termination of UNMIL, which was established under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

The holding of presidential and legislative elections, which are scheduled for October, and the peaceful transfer of power in January 2018 will be important milestones in consolidating peace in Liberia. Uruguay is convinced that democratic processes that are conducted in a free, inclusive and transparent manner and with the highest possible participation of voters are precisely those that make it possible to forge a lasting peace. We note with satisfaction the efforts of the Government to implement State authority throughout Liberian territory. Only in that way will all of the country's inhabitants be able to benefit from the dividends of peace.

However, many challenges remain for Liberia. The country will need to step up its efforts in the area of security. It will also be necessary to address the root causes that fuelled the conflict in the past. With that in mind, it is essential to enact pertinent legislation on land-ownership rights and local administration. Furthermore, it will be important to strengthen State institutions that promote and ensure compliance with rules. Corruption is another scourge affecting Liberia that needs to be eliminated from all levels of Government so that it has solid, transparent and reliable institutions.

Uruguay notes with particular concern the human rights situation in Liberia, which is a fundamental aspect in which the desired progress has not yet been achieved. In order for the efforts focused on the stability and security of the country to be maintained in the long run, the protection and promotion of human rights will need to be one of the top priorities, together with accountability and such issues as restorative justice, truth and reconciliation. It is also a source of serious concern that there are many cases of sexual violence and gender violence, certain persistent harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and accusations of witchcraft, and restrictions on the freedom of expression. Sexual and gender-based violence, which has particularly affected girls, is a problem that must be urgently addressed.

The awareness-raising campaign about such cases, organized by UNMIL and the Liberian Ministry for Gender, Childhood and Social Protection, is a step in the right direction. However, efforts should be stepped up by the Government to prevent and respond to such crimes and put an end to the persistent impunity of those who perpetrate them. Bearing in mind the still precarious situation of human rights in Liberia, Uruguay would endorse the observations of the Secretary-General on the need to establish a satellite office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, especially in the light of the imminent withdrawal of UNMIL from the country.

Today's meeting offers us an excellent opportunity to congratulate UNMIL for its work in supporting the Government of Liberia and in providing protection to civilians, as well as for its contribution to achieving national peace and reconciliation in the country. Uruguay hopes to see the closure of UNMIL, a process that has been under way for some time, take place in a timely and successful manner. Our delegation also acknowledges the work of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission for its work with the Government and international and local partners and for its drafting of a peacebuilding plan for Liberia. In that regard, we would like to thank and particularly congratulate the Swedish delegation for its leadership.

The United Nations — in particular the Security Council, UNMIL and the Peacebuilding Commission — has provided support for the peace process in Liberia through various actions that will, we hope, together with the efforts of the people and the Government of Liberia, contribute to making Liberia a success story.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation congratulates you, Mr. President, on organizing today's meeting on the situation in Liberia, a fraternal and friendly country for Senegal, with which we share membership in all international organizations, and above all, our subregional organization, the Economic Community of West African States. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing. And I also thank our colleague and neighbour, Olof Skoog, Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for his visit and for the briefing he has just given us about his visit. We look forward to the statement by our colleague the Permanent Representative of Liberia.

The Senegalese delegation would simply like to take the floor to recall the long way that Liberia has come to reach this day.

Since before the intervention of the United Nations, the subregional engagement of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group has contributed to stabilizing the country, ultimately leading to the stability and security of the situation in the country only a few months before the upcoming presidential and legislative elections in October, for which 22 political parties and coalitions will present their candidates and 2.1 million voters have registered, of whom — it is important to underscore — 48 per cent are women. Those elections are all the more important, as they will enshrine a historic and peaceful transition of power, while, at the same time, consolidating the transformation of Liberia and sustainably establishing peace and democracy within the context of the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The Liberian forces will then resume their sovereign right concerning security matters, with the support, when needed, of the Senegalese rapid-reaction force, which has been redeployed from the United Nations operation in the Congo to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and could be deployed from Mopti.

In that regard, the Senegalese delegation welcomes the various stakeholders' commitments to ensuring that the upcoming elections are held in a free and transparent manner and that all disputes are settled peacefully through established mechanisms and in accordance with the rule of law. Accordingly, we commend the important work carried out thus far by the National Elections Commission and call on the various stakeholders to lend it all the necessary support, in particular by providing the $1.8 million necessary to fill the gap for financing the electoral process.

On 23 January, the President of Liberia, Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, presented her final annual state of the nation address, in which she identified national reconciliation the fight against corruption as the Government's priorities for the rest of her tenure. On 31 May and 1 June, the Government of Liberia, supported by UNMIL, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, hosted a national forum facilitated by the Interreligious Council of Liberia, which culminated on 4 June in the signing of the Farmington River Declaration by standard-bearers and political leaders of 20 out of the 22 registered political parties. The signatories to the Declaration declared their commitment to a peaceful electoral process and the transition of power to a new Government in January.

I stress the issue of elections because the Council has noted that, in the western part of Africa, electoral processes continue to be a source of tension. But I would also like to underscore the concern — which we should all share — with regard to the macroeconomic situation, which continues to be affected negatively by the general decline in commodity prices and the residual impact of the Ebola epidemic. The International Monetary Fund estimates that Liberia faces a significant shortfall in revenue despite receiving approximately $75 million in direct budget support from donors for the fiscal year 2016-2017.

The Council should therefore consider the importance of finding the optimal way of responding to the various challenges that continue to confront the country, especially by fully supporting the implementation of the peacebuilding plan developed by the Government of Liberia at the request of the Security Council, involving financial resources, institutional capacity-building and expertise. It is at such a price that, after having achieved making Liberia into a success story with regard to peacekeeping, the Council will continue to transform Liberia, thereby making it into a success story in terms of peacebuilding.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): I am honoured to address this meeting of the Security Council on behalf of the Government and the people of Liberia, and thank the Secretary-General for his thirty-third progress report (S/2017/510) on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zarif and Ambassador Skoog for their comments and statements, and thank the Ambassador of the brotherly State of Senegal.

Allow me, Sir, to draw your kind attention to three points.

The first is that the United Nations Mission in Liberia is a successful peacekeeping operation. Today, as the report confirms, Liberia is relatively secure and stable. From previous levels of up to 15,000 men and women, the United Nations Mission in Liberia will complete its mission and undergo a final drawdown in April 2018.

After nearly 14 years since the first peacekeeping boots landed on the bloody soil of my country, there is today no doubt that the peacekeeping mission can be credited with enabling and catalysing Liberia's ongoing political and economic transformation.

Notwithstanding the present challenges, where there formerly was pervasive hopelessness when the troops arrived, ours has come to be a more hopeful society. Where death and destruction once stalked our streets, a renewed commitment to democratic governance and the popular desire to rebuild the broken nation now drive the discourse and motivate a break with our tragic past. Having concluded the inclusive development of a peacebuilding plan consistent with resolution 2333 (2016), Liberia is seeking continued partnerships and support to sustain its peace and continue the needed reforms as the peacekeeping mission comes to a successful end.

That brings me to the second point. It was 73 years ago when a living President last democratically transferred power to another in Liberia. The inauguration in January 2018 of a new Liberian Administration will mark only the second time that that will have happened since 1847 — the year Liberia became independent. That historic significance is not lost on Liberians and further motivates our will to succeed. Lest we forget, beyond that historic significance, there are other important consequences linked to a successful holding of peaceful, democratic elections in Liberia.

We are proud to acknowledge that our West African subregion is expanding the space for democratic governance and the peaceful transition of power. Given the shared history and sociology of our region, in the same way in which it has been relatively easy to experience the spread of conflict and misery across our borders, peace and a renewed commitment to democratic governance — notwithstanding the obvious challenges — are now overtaking the subregional space of the Economic Community of West African States. Consequently, a successful holding of peaceful, democratic elections in Liberia will continue to pave the way for other important successes in expanding the democratic space across the West African subregion, as well as significantly impacting the consolidation of regional peace and security.

At home, many still wish that the election was about a choice of the best ideas in continuing to build a future of continued peace and development, and that, rather than the quantity of political parties, the ongoing competition would be flavoured by the quality of the political discourse. Imperfect as it currently is, we seem to be getting better with each attempt at institutionalizing the process of democratic change.

It must also be noted that the mere exercise of the choice to freely and fairly elect the leaders of our country, with a sense of growing regularity and confidence in both the electoral processes and associated outcomes, meaningfully contributes to deepening a new culture of peace, lends itself to democratic governance and expressions, empowers ordinary citizens and keeps the elected leaders duly accountable. We intend to continue along that path in order to resolve the attending irregularities, improve upon the imperfections and deepen public confidence, not only in the usefulness of democratic elections, but also in the sustainable values of democratic transitions and governance.

That is why the National Elections Commission and other relevant stakeholders are working to resolve irregularities that may have arisen from the recent registration of qualified voters. Liberians know that we win — all of us will be winners — if, once again, this ground-breaking election proves to inspire public confidence in the electoral process and if the outcomes are based on the free, fair, credible and transparent exercise of the public's rights and duties as responsible citizens. Let me therefore assure the Council that for the Liberian Government and people, to achieve that important undertaking there is no lack of political will. However, as we are beginning to see, political will may not necessarily be enough.

The report of the Secretary-General is comprehensive, including in its description of the depressing state of the Liberian economy. That is why, despite the various austerity measures currently being implemented, the Liberian Government is growing concerned about a $17.5 million funding gap for the implementation of the activities of the National Elections Commission. So far, out of the $45 million requested by the National Elections Commission, the Liberian Government has committed to the payment of $20 million and the international community has committed about $8 million. The difference is yet to be committed.

That brings me to the final point. Despite the many challenges that lie ahead, Liberians are still growing in confidence about the future of our country. Indeed,

arriving at where we are has been a long, costly and arduous journey. We pay special homage to all those who made the ultimate sacrifice — voluntarily and involuntarily — to get us here and we are grateful to the United Nations, its various specialized agencies, as well as our multilateral, regional and bilateral partners for their continued support and accompaniment. We also reserve special thanks for the people of Liberia for their continued resilience and steadfast belief both in the ongoing transformation of Liberia and in a future of togetherness, security and peace. Especially in that light, the report broadly confirms that we have not, as yet, begun to run as we know we can. But the truth is also that Liberians are no longer standing still, weighed down by a dehumanizing sense of hopelessness or the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead in sustaining our peace.

We know that a more just, equitable and inclusive society is the pillar required to strengthen the peace and security architecture whose foundations we were enabled to establish. We know that change is hard, but change we must to realize the benefits of the enormous potential in human and other natural resources with which we have been blessed. We know that we must continue to be transparent in the management of our resources and accountable to each other, including in confronting the darkness of our tragic past and therefrom forever inscribe its valuable lessons on the national consciousness. We know we must continue to reform not only the things that are easy, but also the ones that are difficult and necessary, including laws concerning rights to land, local Government and domestic violence, because they pronounce upon our overall ability to sustain our peace.

Those are all various forms of development and fruition. Of course, we wish the pace were faster, but we must also heed one of the stand-out lessons from our tragic past, which is that it is best to lead where others follow. That is even more profound for countries such as ours, emerging from protracted conflicts that were driven by the chilling effects of exclusions. The slow pace is therefore not a consequence of the lack of political will; it is the recognition of the need to meaningfully strive to always bring the majority of the people along in the change process and to link reforms with institutional capacities, most of which are non-existent, in order to enforce the change. Consequently, we have seen that as the fiscal space has unfortunately constricted around us, so too has the pace of the reforms decelerated.

Notwithstanding, Liberians are growing in confidence that we are on a more assured path to consolidating our peace. The election, re-election and subsequent leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman to be elected President, have inspired Liberian women and girls, more than half of the Liberian population, broken their silence and steered them away from exclusion in the national decision-making processes of the country. We know that we must continue to inspire and engage them, including our youthful population. Quite simply, Liberia will never be the same. We continue to change for the better.

We still have a long way to go to be the society that we know we can be, but we are pleased with the growing recognition, including in the report that Liberia has come a long way. We urge continued partnership with the international community, the Peacebuilding Commission and the various agencies of the United Nations towards sustaining our peace. Liberia and Liberians are ready for this. We are ready to draw on the gains already made to build a society that is tolerant of our differences and respectful of the rights of all of its citizens. Once again, we are ready to present the United Nations with an important story of success — this time, with peacebuilding, just as we have with peacekeeping.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.